A NEW PROGRAM FOR THE TEACHING OF LITERARY HISTORY.

To Paul Friedländer on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday: March 21, 1942.

A book of good will and noble intent has appeared * which is intended to reform the teaching of literary history in American colleges and universities. The importance and sincerity of purpose of this book make "a mere review" of it inappropriate, and I have been asked instead to present in the form of an article my reflections on the questions which it raises. I submit these reflections particularly to scholars in classical philology, since this is the oldest and most matured of the various branches of philology, and this I do with the greater pleasure, since it affords me the opportunity of dedicating this paper to one who is a past master in the interpretation of ancient texts, who knows the secret of weaving together into an artistic tissue, itself comparable to the works of art on which he comments, the many threads of his immense learning, whether this be of a literary, historical, archaeological, or philosophical nature.

In this book which I wish to discuss, there has been worked out, by philologians who are also φιλόμουσοι, a "rationale" of literary scholarship intended as a reform program of a humanistic type for American university graduate work in philology. Pointing out, sometimes in scorching terms, the deficiencies of existent practice, the authors outline an ideal of philological training, in which all five collaborators basically agree, though the emphasis of each may vary in the details.[1] In the opinion

* Norman Foerster, John C. McGalliard, René Wellek, Austin Warren, Wilbur L. Schramm, *Literary Scholarship, its Aims and Methods.* Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1941. Pp. viii + 269.

[1] In view of the essential unity of their aims it would be unfair to dwell on certain contradictions between the collaborators—such as the puristic approach of Wellek, on the one hand, who fears that in accepting subjects of *Kulturgeschichte* as contributions to literary history "the study of everything connected with the history of civilization *may* crowd out strictly literary studies" (p. 109), and the more eclectic attitude of Warren, on the other, who is more liberal in delimiting the field of literary criticism: "There is, one is tempted to say, no kind of learning a critic cannot use if his learning does not overbalance his

of this group, combined instruction in language, literary history, literary criticism, and creative writing (the last two of which, according to our authors, are new additions to the current curriculum) is the *sine qua non* program from which no single unit can be omitted without causing the collapse of the whole. Norman Foerster outlines the "programmatic" program, and the four subsequent articles are devoted to working out in more detail the four branches of this teaching.

Of the two new disciplines to be included in this program, everyone must welcome the acceptance of literary criticism on an equal level with literary history: literary scholarship, conceived only historico-relatively and involving no application of canons of taste, becomes nonsensical (in Germany the adoption of the more comprehensive term *Literaturwissenschaft* in the place of the former *Literaturgeschichte* testifies to the same trend of thought). As for creative writing, the inclusion of such a subject within literary scholarship must appear surprising to any educator of philologists versed in the academic procedure of other countries, where such a practice is unknown, save in Catholic theological faculties. In view of the present situation of American education, it may indeed be a sound policy for the colleges to repair the damage wrought by the criminal neglect in high schools of the art of composition. But I am puzzled by the proposal to install, on the same level with the three *disciplines* of language, literary history, and literary criticism, a *pedagogical device* intended to stimulate the study and understanding of these disciplines; in this way the authors disregard the clear-cut distinction that has always existed between fields and methods, between scholarship and applied science—between the increase of knowledge which is the millennial purpose of the *universitas litterarum*, and training of skills which belongs to the technical schools and "academies." There is, of course, no limit to the number of *incidental* training courses which, depend-

taste and his judgment"; it would be petty chicanery also to emphasize that McGalliard's article on "language" is more a factual picture of the situation of today in linguistics (coupled with exhortation to the literary scholar to interest himself in such studies) than a plan for the future of teaching and research in linguistics, whereas the other collaborators deal more with the future they envisage than with the present away from which they want to move.

ing on individual, social, local, and national needs, might be profitably included in a philological program; and I could imagine, in the situation of today, still other obligations equally important for the young philologist—for example, a *convivium* with selected representatives of various nationalities: if students in Romance were given the opportunity of mingling with young French, Italian, Spanish intellectuals, they would not only manage to learn the foreign languages in a less pitiful way than through the teaching administered by half-prepared graduates, but they would also become imbued with the spirit and the civilization of other countries (and some of this same polyglotism would do no harm to students in English, who should see their own literature and civilization in its proper relation, and relativity, to other literatures and civilizations). Yet I would not pretend that "contact with foreigners" should be included on an equal level with the discipline of the curriculum of the American university. The program of the University should be a supra-temporal (as it generally is a supra-national) one: it should not be dependent on the particular oscillations of the educational situation at any one time; the University program should be and remain "eternal" [2]—whereas in the methods of teaching it is fitting that there be the continual flux and reflux of life.

Furthermore, in spite of the alluring colors with which Schramm depicts the *convivium* of philologists and writers as another *Abbaye de Thélème* or *Pontigny*, I wonder if the blurring of the lines of demarcation between philologist and writer (poet) would not in the end lead to a confusion of the different training to which the two groups must be subjected. Whereas the poet uses books (and life) as stimulants in order to express himself overtly, directly, there is a *latent* lyricism in the scholar: the scholar in philology, it seems to me, is a man given to con-

[2] The authors have little to say about the fact that, of this eternal program of an ideal University, the unifying centre today is missing: in the past it was philosophy which served as the unifying factor among the different sciences. A vestige of this situation remains to us in the (anachronistic) term "Faculty of Philosophy"—but this today is only so many words. Our authors definitely see unification more in the poetic than in the philosophic; but should there not be a deeper pondering of the relationship of the two, to the end that the poetic would unify literary scholarship, but literary scholarship, together with other sciences, should be grouped around philosophy?

cealing his enthusiasms and his beliefs behind scholarly material; with dignified modesty, elusive reserve, and the essential chastity of the "philological poet" he rejects the directly lyrical way of expressing his emotions, interposing between himself and his reader the weight of his materials. He is the opposite of the pure poet who "gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name"; he extracts the "airy nothings" of general ideas from local (and temporal) data. While the great philologist is surely not a man "with loads of learned lumber in his head," still he has need of "loads of learned lumber"—over which his soul must triumph. And the encouragement of this "indirect lyricism," of which all the great philologists have been possessed (Jakob Grimm, Gaston Paris, Menéndez Pidal) calls for a training different from that which is essential to the "poet." [3]

Moreover, as concerns the proper training for the true poet: perhaps an officially enjoined poetic program is not really desirable. The poetic behavior must perhaps ever be a reaction of protest against the world—a world ever led by utilitarian motives: the situation of the young poet, forced to leave college because there is no place for him there, though pathetic whenever it happens (and how often has it not happened in all countries!), is, after all, salutary for the poet and, by ricochet, for society. The poetic soul, invited out of the dens of rebellion and conspiracy and officially installed in the seat of power, is sometimes a pitiful sight (Croce as an Italian minister of instruction!).

Thus I could wish that the program of our authors had more clearly drawn the necessary distinctions between (a) methods and fields, (b) the training of the poet and of the philologian. But, as regards the essential aim of their program, the proposal of our authors for the education of a certain type of humanist

[3] Sainte-Beuve has spoken of the literary critic as a man who wants to "exhaler avec détour une poésie cachée":

> C'est une erreur de croire que la poésie ne doive se produire que directement . . . Le poète, sous le critique, se retrouve et ne fait qu'un avec lui par l'esprit et la vie . . . cette intelligence secrète et sentie, . . . cet art particulier dont la sobre magie se dissimule à chaque pas, qui ne convertit pas tout en or, mais qui rend à tout ce qu'il touche la qualité propre et la vraie valeur, tient de très près à l'esprit poétique.

Sainte-Beuve himself is an example of a would-be poet who could find his true vocation, that of a critic, only by severing, gradually but consistently, his ties with poetry and the poets.

à la Erasmus is in itself very appealing to me. I only ask myself whether they have fully weighed the implications of such a program *for Americans.* Are they really aware of the fact that their school program involves greater issues than the matter of scholastic improvement, that in some respects it clashes with basic tenets of American ways of life? For example, let us consider the five reasons given, in the preface, p. vi, for "our present discontents" with the standards of professors of philology:

1. the lack of "calling" to scholarship in the graduate students
2. academic preferment of quantity to quality of publications
3. the less and less liberal education offered by secondary school and college
4. the heavy burden of teaching
5. the fundamental cause: wrong application of scientific methods to letters

I see in these five factors only symptoms of deeper forces active in the American mind, and consequently in the American school system: these are not features which can be eliminated by better academic regulations. For example factor no. 1 is mainly due to what I would call the American "job ideology," according to which the fact of a youngster's getting a job, any job, is rated higher than his qualifications for a particular job; and this emphasis on "being active in some way" (whether one works at teaching, in business, or in a filling station) is, in turn, deeply related to the basic tenets of Calvinism. The young American student in not given as much time as is his European prototype to develop first as a human being, before being called upon to earn his living: hence the situation Lewisohn polemically points out in *Up-stream*: the student goes to the University not primarily in order to have his soul enriched but to learn the tools of his profession.[4] Again, the not unimportant factor of early marriage, so conducive to the moral purity of the American

[4] To express it in the harshly caricaturing words of Max Weber (*Wissenschaft als Beruf* [1919]):

> Der Lehrer, der ihm [dem amerikanischen Knaben] gegenübersteht, von dem hat er die Vorstellung: er verkauft mir seine Kenntnisse und Methoden für meines Vaters Geld, ganz ebenso wie die Gemüsefrau meiner Mutter den Kohl. Damit fertig.

But Weber sees also some basic soundness in this aloof attitude of the American college boy who does not want his "teacher" to become a "Führer"!

youngsters, who are spared the premarital debasement of European youths, increases the necessity of finding a job early ("for instance, teaching!") before the individual (the teacher) is yet fully developed.

In the emphasis on "quantity rather than quality of research" (no. 2) one may see a result of the superimposition of German upon English standards: America inherited the English college system in which the same personnel serves for the undergraduate and the graduate teaching; in this way, while the scholarly standards of the former are raised, those of the latter must needs be lowered. To this system, overzealous college presidents have often sought to introduce the standard imported from German universities: "teaching *and* research" (*Forschung und Lehre*), with the result that scholarly ambitions have been fostered in many teachers who, otherwise, would never have thought of contributing to research. In the final analysis, to be sure, the eagerness to increase our scholarly output need not have led to the present-day situation, had not our administrators been so ready to transfer to the "business" of education the ideal of "efficiency": but this is an ideal deeply engrained in the American character—and one which has borne such splendid fruit in the many contributions which America has made to modern progress.

As for no. 3, the secondary schools and colleges, imbued more or less as they are with the spirit of progressive education, believe in treating the students to their personal preferences, and in experimenting ever anew with what should be considered as the immutable bulk of knowledge, matured by more than two thousand years of Western civilization—and obligatory for any of the future members of this civilization. But is this propensity for experimentation not characteristic of a young nation, with its Protestant belief that absolute truth is never "stably" reached, and is the individualization of school curricula not dictated by a respect for youth, which, likewise, is capable of Cartesian reason?

The "burden of teaching" deplored by our authors is to be explained in part by the lack of official recognition in this country of scholarship as a profession in itself, of *Wissenschaft als Beruf*; in the United States, where the Benjamin Franklins and Thomas Edisons represent the American type of intellectual,

there is little encouragement for the "pure scholar." Thus, in the absence of any such institution as that of the *Privatdozent,* the young scholar is forced to spend most of his time teaching. But this "burden" is also to be explained by reference to the *positive* fact of the American faith in the efficacy of teaching—and in the necessity of much teaching (often at the expense of mental activity on the part of the student). This faith in turn (so different from the fatalistic attitude of European professors toward their students) corresponds to the belief of a Cartesian democracy (Tocqueville!) that human reason is given to all, and that improvement is possible for all students if they are subjected long enough to reasoning. The belief that every pupil is educable (and every truth explainable) must of necessity lead to an emphasis on teaching, which, detrimental though it be to the encouragement of research, cannot easily be eliminated from the American colleges and universities.

As for the "fundamental reason," scientism or positivism in letters, this tendency has, according to my knowledge, been steadily on the decrease since 1900 in the schools of higher learning in France, Spain, and Germany. In America, on the other hand, Positivism, long abandoned by the countries in which it originated, has continued to hold its own. And I feel that one cannot interpret its hardy survival in this climate merely as evidence that America is "lagging behind" other nations; this would presuppose that she is going in the same direction with these, and needs only to be exhorted to quicken her stride. But it may be that America has long since found her stride, and found her own path; scientific positivism must have a deep relationship to the American mind: the so-called "anachronism" may be none other than a holding fast to basic ideals.[5]

Without contesting the nobility of their purpose to educate the *philologus poeta,* and while fully sharing with them the

[5] Of course, it may happen that, in specific cases, both interpretations are possible. For example, is the American journal, *Modern Language Notes,* of whose advisory staff I happen to be a member (faced with many perplexities), an anachronism—clinging to the faith of Positivism that scholarship is a great architecture for which *any* little stone may have one day some value, since we cannot yet build "in our time"; or does its avowedly restricted outlook to details, and details of a more factual nature, betray a basic American mistrust in the "building" of a synthesis?

aversion to the academic adage, satirized by Max Eastman (p. 178) that "the poet in history is divine, the poet in the next room is a joke," I cannot help thinking that our authors do not face squarely enough the fact that they want to build, starting from the University, a *new* American character; that, while building up their ideal American university, they would be destroying the *homo Americanus* as he is. Thus the problem must be faced: is such a radical change *possible* or *advisable*? As for myself I must confess that, after having long pondered these two staggering questions, I do not know the answer. If our authors believe that the change is possible, it seems to me that the forum to which they should apply could not be an academic one alone: they should undertake a nation-wide campaign for a new type of American; otherwise, the *homo poeticus* of their breeding would not, I fear, be supported by public opinion and public institutions. While I admire the intrepidity of this minority group of Iowa democratically battling for their ideals at the vantage point of their college, I must ask myself whether they fully see [6] the Antaeic forces of the enemy

[6] At times, it seems to me, the authors are not fully aware of (or perhaps they refrain diplomatically from drawing) the far-reaching implications of the fundamental tenet of their creed, that the student in letters must know how to read. For to be able to read poetic texts poetically means to me to be able to see related all the parts of the work of art to the whole and the whole to the parts, in a kind of to-and-fro symbolism of analytic synthesis and synthetic analysis. And these operations of the philologian rest in a nearly religious belief in a superhuman organism of the work of art in which nothing is insignificant; they are in fact *identical* (not only *parallel*) to the operations of the creator of art himself, and they are historically an outgrowth of the *omnia in majorem Dei gloriam* of the religious believer: the French *explication de textes* method, strongly advocated for Americans (p. 24), is an outgrowth of theological exegesis, and Jakob Grimm's recommendation to the philologian, "*Andacht zum Kleinen,*" uses not in vain the religious term "devotion." The teaching of the poetic sense then would imply nothing less than a radical change in the human nature of the student, a return to the religious roots of mankind—at least to the kind of "religious musicality" which has been created by centuries of Christendom.

But, when I read such a sentence as "He [the student of letters] should have some (!) understanding of religion, since the Christian tradition enters largely (!) into the literature he studies and literature itself is a profession of faith, involving as it does visions of reality and

and the gigantic dimensions of the warfare necessary to win this battle (in which I myself have enrolled with all my heart).

I hesitate at the very moment of writing down these lines to make myself the *advocatus diaboli* and to speak against the large-scale application of the principles for which I have fought my whole life, and on which I, as a private individual, am used to base my teaching. But must not the pedagogue-scholar become sorely perplexed when he, while personally believing in the desirability of a particular type of humanity, is at the same time confronted with the spirit of a whole nation and epoch, with the manifestations of that *Volks-* and *Zeitgeist* which he, as a practitioner of literary scholarship, has learned to respect? Without wishing to be labelled a historical determinist, I feel myself inadequate to legislate against history, against the history of the civilization, ethics, religion, of a nation. For this dilemma—whether to accept the present college situation and build in a more "American" way, or, to fight against the present state of things, but fight aware of the large scope of the battle—no program, however nobly planned, can offer a solution until the vast implications of the problem have been faced.

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After having discussed the general scope of the reform program offered in this volume, I should like now to take up two of the articles in particular, for the simple reason that they have affected me personally and most provocatively. The most stimulating, the most forthright article (though one conceived less as a program for poetic education than as a neat delimitation of literary historiography) is that of Mr. Wellek, an adept of the

ethical affirmation" (p. 22), I fail to see that the writer has felt, in a sufficiently *interior* way, the potentially religious (not only ethical) state of mind which is at the bottom of making and reading poetry. I also fail to see the full awareness of the truism that "understanding" presupposes "being" a *homo poeticus*: the "poetical reader" must by definition be a "poetical being": a man who in his daily life, when he sees a tree, a squirrel, or a sky-scraper, is of his own accord moved to carry out with these the poetical metamorphosis. A man who would only *read* poetically would strangely resemble a "poetry automaton," a motor one can turn on and off at will; and this is surely not what our authors strive toward. "One of the best ways of understanding imaginative literature is to write it"—yes; but *the best* way of understanding it is to *be* imaginative.

Prague school. According to him, the history of literature, in order not to fail as *history* or as history of *art*—i. e., in order to avoid being what it currently is, a series of disjointed impressions or an accumulation of material alien to poetry—should be history of a purely literary evolution towards a specific goal, value, or norm; the history, for example, of the literary work of an author (or of an epoch, a motif, a genre, etc.) with reference to its point of maturity or final evolution. This definition, which I would call "terminal" (in both senses of the word: "end" and "goal") [7] will not strike the reader as absolutely new (indeed it is an application to literary history of Voltaire's approach to cultural historiography) nor will he accept it as exclusive: should there not also be justification, since we are brought back to a biologically conceived evolution, for a descendent development of historical writing—a *grandeur et décadence*—, or for the Corneillian triptych containing both crescendo and decrescendo (Corneille "se cherche"—"se trouve"—"se perd"); should there not be permitted any *Sinngebung des Sinnlosen,* the organization of the inconsequential brought about by the *historian?* In fact, Mr. Wellek, systematically objective-minded as he is, never speaks of the historian as an individual facing historic reality. History, like a novel, is a piece of reality seen through the lens of a personal temperament, which will impose its own *Sinngebung.* The problem of literary historiography seems to me less difficult in practice than in theory: any gifted historian of literature will unify (*Sinn geben* to) the parcels of historic reality, thanks to the unity which his mind necessarily imposes on discordant data. Mr. Wellek is probably stronger when

[7] The "terminality" of Mr. Wellek would evidently preclude the possibility of writing a national literary history (since the historiographer does not know the "end" of the story—the goal to which the journey of the nation is directed): but I would say that if the historian sees a particular *Sinngebung,* a meaning and direction in the literary history of a country, he may very well write this history. Wellek is also opposed to histories of groups of literatures, basing himself on such experiments as that of L. Olschki's history of all the Romance literatures during the Middle Ages. But, if Olschki's attempt was not wholly successful, this was because, in wanting to be all-comprehensive, he had not chosen any definite *Sinngebung*; for instance, he failed to follow up the idea of the rise and development of a "Romance" literature as opposed to classic literature; this was pointed out by Auerbach in his critique.

criticizing many abuses than when prescribing a single legitimate usage.

As for the contribution of Mr. McGalliard, I cannot understand that, in a book purporting to outline the training of the φιλόλογος φιλόμουσος, so much of the article on "language" should be given up to a description, with no attempt at rebuttal, of the views of the anti-mentalistic school of linguistics. A biased opinion such as the one cited on p. 79:

> Language creates and exemplifies a twofold value of some human actions. In its *biophysical* aspect language consists of sound-producing movements and of the resultant sound waves and of the vibration of the hearer's eardrums. The *biosocial* . . . function of language arises from a uniform, traditional, and arbitrary training of the persons in a certain group. They have been trained to utter conventional sounds as a secondary response to situations and to respond to these light sounds, with a kind of trigger effect, with all sorts of actions,

seems to me, in its emphasis on the mechanical, secondary, and traditional, to preclude the understanding of any innovation in language, whether artistic or non-artistic, and especially the rise of that poetic sensibility, that very awe before the self-transcending power of language on which the education of our reformers is based. If language is only "responsive" why look to it for (artistic) creation, why busy oneself with "*creative* writing"? Moreover, "trigger effects" in fact could produce, and up till now have only too much produced, reading which is uncreative, unpoetic—that is to say, no reading at all.

It is perhaps not out of place to quote here Wilhelm von Humboldt, the author of the definition "language = ἐνέργεια, not ἔργον":

> Die Menschen verstehen einander nicht dadurch, dass sie sich Zeichen der Dinge wirklich hingeben, auch nicht dadurch dass sie sich gegenseitig bestimmen, genau und vollständig denselben Begriff hervorzubringen, sondern dadurch, dass sie gegenseitig einander dasselbe Glied der Kette ihrer sinnlichen Vorstellungen und inneren Begriffserzeugungen berühren, dieselbe Taste ihres geistigen Instruments anschlagen, worauf alsdann in jedem entsprechende, nicht aber dieselben Begriffe hervorspringen.
>
> Die unfehlbare Gegenwart des jedesmal notwendigen Wortes in dieser [Rede des Alltags] ist gewiss nicht bloss

> Werk des Gedächtnisses, kein menschliches Gedächtnis reichte dazu hin, wenn nicht die Seele instinktmässig zugleich den Schlüssel zur Bildung der Wörter selbst in sich trüge.
>
> Die Sprache besteht, neben den schon geformten Elementen, ganz vorzüglich auch aus Methoden, die Arbeit des Geistes, welcher sie die Bahn und die Form vorzeichnet, weiter fortzusetzen (quotations taken from Delbrück, *Einleitung in das Studium der idg. Sprachen*, p. 46).

The touch of the keyboard, the key to a half-veiled arcanum, these metaphors, more evocative of poetry, are also more appropriate to the essence of speech than is the "trigger-effect." As a matter of course, our anti-mentalists refuse to *believe* in anything beyond the crude sense data, and they disavow all the past Greco-Roman-Christian civilization that vibrates behind the noble words of Humboldt. One could say of them the melancholy truth of the Latin words: *vera rerum amiserunt vocabula.* What they call "language" is not language; they themselves have fallen a prey to their despiritualizing of language: they use the word "language" in a manner devoid of the ἐνέργεια which has hitherto been implied in this term. Let us hope that the war which has so quickly done away with the "debunking" of the belief in civic virtues will restore the belief in the human mind.

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